



## Looking at the Ukrainian Crisis

The political crisis in Ukraine started in early 2014. That crisis has opened a new period of rivalry and confrontation between former Cold War adversaries. The relationship of the West with the Russian Federation is at its worst since before the Cold War ended.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of the new tension is within and around the Ukraine. We are confronted with an interstate conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which is also an international crisis. Crimea was illegally annexed by Russia and the eastern part of the Ukraine escalated into an armed conflict between the separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (Donbass region) and the Ukrainian government.

### Military and Diplomatic Crisis

The current Ukraine crisis is both a military and a diplomatic crisis and it is likely to endure for years. As seen from Moscow, Europe does pose a challenge, if not an outright threat. Whether or not NATO leaders are willing to admit it, the alliance's expansion into the former Warsaw Pact and even the Soviet Union has resulted in a vastly different geopolitical balance in Europe, with Russia as the loser. Ukraine's Maidan Revolution<sup>2</sup> promises to bring NATO's influence – if not its formal presence – to within 300 miles of Moscow and that is a bitter pill for Russian military and political leaders to swallow.

Ukraine is not presently a NATO member, but Ukraine's leaders have declared their intention to join NATO (as well as to associate with the European Union), and Russian aggression against Ukraine and threats to the Baltic States have mobilized NATO to take steps it has not taken in many years.<sup>3</sup> The fear of insecurity is shared by other Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania. As members, they explicitly rely on NATO's protection. Finland, that has a long border with Russia, has increased its border protection and joined NATO's Partnership for Peace.<sup>4</sup>

Russia accuses the West of employing double standards when it comes to applying international law to the inviolability of national borders. This is remarkable when one considers that it took 9 years before the first countries recognized Kosovo. Today it is recognized by 108 states. It took Russia 19 days to annex Crimea and Sevastopol. Only 6 countries recognize this annexation. Furthermore, since the end of the Cold War, Russia kept the frozen conflicts in Georgia and Moldova alive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. Trenin (2015). "Ukraine and the New Divide." <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=56435>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Ukrainian\\_revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Ukrainian_revolution)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine%E2%80%93European\\_Union\\_relations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine%E2%80%93European_Union_relations)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49594.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm)

<sup>5</sup> P. Nopens (2015). « Beyond Russia's 'Versailles Syndrome' ». <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SPB58.pdf>

## Long Term Problem

Ukraine is a divided country. Its political landscape mirrors the country's deep divide between the West and Russia: part is pro-European Union, and the other part is pro-Russian Federation. The divisions are very deep, with profound hatred evident on all sides and at all levels of society.

The whole of Ukraine has been destabilised by a conflict that has already cost between 9.000 and 10.000 lives (fighters and civilians). The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those seeking refuge abroad is reaching catastrophic proportions. As of April 2015, 1.3 million people have been internally displaced in Ukraine. More than 800.000 people have fled Ukraine, with over 660.000 to Russia, 81.100 to Belarus and thousands more to other countries. Despite the February-implemented Minsk II ceasefire agreement,<sup>6</sup> fighting continues in the Donbass region.

The West has to recognise that the present crisis is not a short-term phenomenon. This state of affairs will last a long time and requires a long-term commitment to deal with Russia and secure Central Europe.<sup>7</sup> The challenge lies deeper in the diplomatic track than in the military sphere. The crisis in Ukraine is a major milestone in European security affairs, but it is only a symptom of a larger problem – that is the lack of having Russia as a reliable partner. Russia should become integrated again within the wider international community as a real and constructive player. Any solution for the Ukrainian crisis should include Russia. The diplomatic track needs to be pursued.

## Open Diplomatic Doors Supported by Civil Society

So far, mutual trust is non-existent. Channels of communication should be rebuilt. A peaceful and sustainable solution should be promoted, based on the principles of solidarity, cooperation and dialogue.

The United Nations should identify sooner than later a senior international leader, or neutral country, to engage in a confidential dialogue and renewed diplomacy involving all key actors.

But in addition to diplomacy, doors for people-to-people exchanges need to be opened wide. Some small steps are being taken by Pax Christi member organisations. Three examples:

1. PAX in the Netherlands<sup>8</sup> and KIK in Warsaw<sup>9</sup> are planning a "Ukraine Youth Peace Tour" in August 2015. The main objective is for youth activists to develop, advocate and actively implement a message of reconciliation and conflict prevention (specifically with regard to the war in Eastern Ukraine and within their network) that is cross-cultural, cross religious and cross-border.
2. Pax Christi Flanders is a key player and driving force behind the Platform "Peace for Ukraine"<sup>10</sup> which brings together 9 organisations from different backgrounds. Recently,

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de.html#axzz3fTWK9Y9>

<sup>7</sup> E. Rumer (2015). "Russia—A Different Kind of Threat." <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/07/20/russia-different-kind-of-threat/idml>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.paxforpeace.nl/about-us>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/member-organizations/poland/145>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.promoteukraine.org/peace-for-ukraine.html>

the Platform was involved in a seminar in the European Parliament on "Building Bridges between Societies for a New Ukraine".<sup>11</sup> That seminar brought together delegates from civil society in both Russia and the Ukraine.

3. Pax Christi Germany<sup>12</sup> is planning in 2016 a church delegation to visit different church leaders in the Ukraine in order to explore common ground on the role of churches and religions in peace building in the country.

A political solution to the crisis in Ukraine supported by civil society is possible. No small action is ever wasted!

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/building-bridges-between-societies-new-ukraine/4603#sthash.OijxyNx.dpbs>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.de/meldungen/view/5309164028952576/Entspannungsappell%20unterst%C3%BCtzen>